

FORESTRY ASSISTANCE

**MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL
RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION**



STRATEGIC PLAN
2022-2025

INTRODUCTION

Our Forests and Operating Environment

Montana's forests are diverse, covering 23 million acres across tribal, public, and private lands, including cities and towns. Private ownerships, from small lots to large ranches, account for 6.2 million acres of forestland in the state, with the largest share (3.8 million acres) owned by more than 83,000 non-industrial private landowners. Montana ranks second only to California in area of private forest land that is critical to public water supply and at high risk of severe impacts from wildland fire.[1] Threats to our forests transcend ownership boundaries, and the abundance of private land affords many opportunities to address the state's forest health and wildfire challenges.

These forests, and the many benefits they provide, are being impacted by drought, development, increased fuel loads, longer wildfire seasons, and ongoing insect and disease outbreaks. These challenges are exacerbated by a changing climate and the growth of communities into the wildland urban interface (WUI). Despite the challenges facing our forests, we can create fire adapted communities and resilient landscapes through strategic, science-based management decisions.

Montana forests are fire-dependent and historically burned at regular intervals from natural ignition. We know from research this burning led to light fuel loadings and primarily low to moderate intensity fires in many forest types. Many of Montana's fire-dependent forest ecosystems had been managed with fire since human habitation. Indigenous people used fire as a tool to maintain, and often improved, the landscape for their use. However, starting in the 1900's many forests have missed numerous burn cycles because of policies of widespread and aggressive fire suppression. This has led to heavier fuel loadings and larger, higher intensity fires when forests burn today. Active management of forests across ownership boundaries is essential to improving forest health, wildfire resilience, and wildlife habitat while also expanding recreational opportunities, supporting local economies, and maintaining aesthetic values.

Montana is fortunate to have an integrated forest products industry that produces valuable and diverse wood products from a wide range of material removed to meet management and restoration goals. Industry provides the workforce and equipment needed to actively manage forests for the future, reduce fuel loads, support wildland fire response, enhance recreational opportunities, maintain roads for public access, complete watershed restoration work, and improve wildlife habitat. Retaining this strong and diverse forest industry is essential to meeting forest health and wildfire risk reduction goals. The cost of living and housing in Montana has been rapidly increasing. This will impact recruitment and retention of the state's forestry workforce through the foreseeable future.

Forestry Assistance provides forestry expertise and resources to manage forest fuels, mitigate the impacts of wildfire, identify and offer solutions for forest insects and disease, establish and maintain urban forests to curb the effects of climate change, and provide landowners all the benefits that accompany sustainable forest management. We have a record of success, but we need to work at a larger scale to make a significant impact on the landscape and in our communities.

Recent passage of both the Bi-partisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Law has significantly increased the amount of potential funding available for fuels reduction, forest management and forest industry investments. This new funding will help us increase the scale and impact of our work.

Getting this work done at a meaningful scale will require our actions to be focused, inclusive, and strategic. It will require strong partnerships and hard work, and more people working both within the agency and the industry. To learn more about the forest resources of Montana and the work to manage them please refer to the 2020 Statewide Assessment of Forest Conditions and the Montana Forest Action Plan. These resources are available at www.montanaforestactionplan.org.

[1] American Forest Foundation. 2015. Western Water Threatened by Wildfire: It's Not Just a Public Land Issue. 27 p. <https://www.forestfoundation.org/western-water-forests-report>.



OUR PROGRAMS

The foundation of Forestry Assistance is tied to the vital role private landowners have in managing the forested land across the state. On April 28, 1955, under the Cooperative Forest Management Act, a new initiative was added to Montana State Forestry, the Cooperative Forest Management Program. This program was designed to offer landowners and mill operators technical advice on management of their forests and mills, primarily for timber production. Today, forest management objectives have diversified, ownerships have become smaller, and a myriad of forest health issues increase the risk of severe wildfire. The Cooperative Forest Management Program evolved with these changes and grew into Forestry Assistance, which has multiple programs and tools to address the challenges and opportunities facing forests and forest owners across the State.

External partnerships are a key component to our success. We collaborate and network with numerous government entities, conservation organizations, and the forest products industry to complete our work. Funding comes from numerous federal and state sources. The most substantial of these is federal pass-through dollars from the USDA Forest Service State and Private Forestry Programs.

There are seven inter-related programs within Forestry Assistance that are delivered across the state. Bureau staff in Missoula lead, support, and build capacity to enable program delivery by the Land Offices, Unit Offices, Service Foresters, and other personnel committed to the mission of the program. This framework facilitates program delivery that is aligned with state-level strategies and priorities but customized for the unique conditions in each of the field areas.

To see a list of Service Foresters and where they are located go to: <https://dnrc.mt.gov/Forestry/Forest-Management/find-local-forester>

THE PROGRAMS WE DELIVER INCLUDE:

THE URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY (UCF) PROGRAM

brings awareness and focus to Montana's urban and community forests. The UCF Program reaches over half of Montana's population every year with services to approximately 75 communities in the form of grants for planting and maintenance, technical expertise, and education.



THE STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

supports private and community forest owners actively and sustainably managing their forests. Each year grant dollars are directed to treat approximately 2,000 acres to reduce wildfire risk near communities. Nearly 1,000 landowners receive technical and educational assistance for their forest ownership goals and objectives annually.



Douglas-fir beetle galleries

THE FOREST PEST MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

assists non-federal landowners and resource managers in preventing, identifying, and managing forest insects and diseases. The program offers training for a diversity of audiences, financial assistance for forest treatments, and annual summaries of insect and disease conditions across the state.

THE FOREST PRACTICES PROGRAM

provides education and guidance on timber harvest and other forest operations through the Forestry Best Management Practices Program (BMP) and through regulatory measures, specifically the Hazard Reduction Program for slash and the Streamside Management Program for protecting Montana's water quality. Over the last 20 years, the Forest Practices Program, together with the forest products industry and partners, have achieved greater than 90% compliance with BMP's and nearly 100% compliance with slash and stream protection laws.



THE FOREST PRODUCTS PROGRAM

provides technical assistance to support forest product businesses, large-scale forest biomass energy applications, market developments, and innovations. The program engages with the design-build sector to promote wood construction and Montana wood products and supports the state's industry retention efforts.

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

provides grant funding, training, information, and technical support for counties, cities, and affiliated groups to strengthen their participation with federal forest land management. Since its inception in 2015, the program has helped local government significantly improve their engagement with federal forestry projects.



THE NURSERY PROGRAM

provides plants for conservation projects throughout the state of Montana. Conservation plantings are an essential strategy to perpetuate forested landscapes and maintain or enhance ecological function in urban settings, agricultural systems, and riparian areas. Currently the nursery has capacity to grow one million seedlings annually.

OUR PLAN

This strategic plan is a key component of a broad effort to be more focused, coordinated, efficient, and effective in delivering Forestry Assistance programs across the state. Montana is a diverse state with urban and rural populations. It is the traditional homeland of many indigenous peoples, both past and present. Local staff and partners have a unique relationship and understanding of their areas and units, allowing for a flexible, adaptive, and customized approach for delivering Forestry Assistance programs. We implement different strategies for different forest types, changing community priorities, values, and demographics.

This plan recognizes these strengths, establishes direction, and creates a framework that is designed to align, integrate, and focus programs to improve the quality of services delivered. This plan establishes our values and roles and will help orient incoming personnel. It defines operating procedures to improve the delivery of our programs and provides internal accountability. It identifies critical work we need to complete to continue to be successful while recognizing the dynamic nature of the operating environment and the capability of people to adapt and deliver. This plan is meant to provide the foundation that Forestry Assistance will use to turn our deliberately defined vision into strategic action for the next ten years.

This plan was developed in 2020 by a core team of DNRC Forestry Assistance staff who represent the varied roles and positions within the Program across the state. It was vetted by key stakeholders who have a vested interest in the success of the Forestry Assistance Program. The plan was developed concurrently with the Montana Forest Action Plan (MFAP). Our funding sources and our strong connection with landowners and partners places us in a key position to help lead and facilitate implementation of the Forest Action Plan and our first goal is to integrate the MFAP throughout our programs. The plan is a living document that was designed to be outcome-focused and flexible. A review of the plan will be conducted bi-annually, and the plan will be updated or refined as necessary to successfully achieve the Program's vision by 2030.

The Forestry Assistance Program strategic plan will help us continue to deliver excellent service to the citizens of Montana in the face of the dynamic changes in our forests.

MISSION / VISION

MISSION

Forestry Assistance provides resources, tools, and forestry expertise to create resilient forests, sustainable economies, and vibrant, fire-adapted communities.

VISION

To fulfill our mission by 2030, the people and programs of Forestry Assistance will provide impactful solutions to the most pressing challenges facing Montana's forests and communities. Our efforts are aligned with Montana's Forest Action Plan; they are collaborative and provide service and leadership to the public and our partners.

Our work supports cross-boundary, landscape-scale projects. Our stewardship approach promotes working forests that are resilient to disturbance and a changing climate. We provide information that is current, accurate, reliable, and grounded in the best available science, and communicate that information using intuitive, state-of-the-art public interfaces.

We value our relationships with both our internal and external partners and rely on the strength of these partnerships to deliver a coordinated approach to managing forests across ownerships.



CORE VALUES

STEWARDSHIP

We recognize the numerous benefits our state's forests provide our citizens. We are committed to increasing our forests' long-term health and resilience in order to continue providing benefits to Montana.

SERVICE

We proudly provide education, outreach, assistance, and support to the citizens, businesses, and communities of Montana

LEADERSHIP

We lead with integrity and creativity. We provide clear direction to deliver forest management from stand to landscape-scale.

COMMUNITY

The diversity of individuals within Forestry Assistance is a source of strength and we support a culture of opportunity, growth, and respect. We foster strong relationships and partnerships to effectively carry out our Mission.

EXCELLENCE

We conduct ourselves with the utmost professionalism. We work diligently and innovatively to implement our programs while using the best available science and technology.

COMMUNICATION

We emphasize responsiveness, clear communication, and information sharing to increase success within our organization, with our partners, and with the public.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- 1** We prioritize actions that accomplish and facilitate cross-boundary, landscape-scale projects in areas with critical forest health and wildfire issues.
- 2** We help the public and our partners achieve forest management goals through education, collaboration, and assistance.
- 3** We recognize the interrelatedness of our Forestry Assistance, Fire Protection, Good Neighbor, and Trust Land Management Programs. We routinely work together to ensure that we leverage our respective strengths and capacity to achieve our mutually beneficial goals of resilient working forests, fire-adapted communities, and sustainable economies.
- 4** We develop and maintain strong productive relationships with peers, partners, and stakeholders to deliver coordinated and effective responses to Montana's forest health and forest management needs.
- 5** We emphasize science and silviculture as critical tools to guide treatments and to provide the benefits of effective forest management.
- 6** We promote the importance of Montana's forest products industry to implement landscape-scale treatments that increase forest resilience, reduce wildfire risk, and benefit local and statewide economies.
- 7** We hold ourselves accountable and are committed to being creative, credible, efficient, and pragmatic. We make measurable progress delivering on our priorities and goals.
- 8** We challenge ourselves and those around us to achieve the best results using sound science coupled with innovative ideas and approaches.
- 9** We structure our programs to be adaptive and responsive to changing conditions.
- 10** We invest in our people and encourage their success and wellbeing by supporting their work on personal and professional development at all levels.
- 11** We pursue financial resources strategically and manage all budgets responsibly and efficiently.
- 12** We promote and foster a productive and safe work environment.



GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal 1: Develop a responsive Forestry Assistance Program that integrates the Montana Forest Action Plan (MFAP) and clearly articulates the purpose, roles, and responsibilities for successful delivery of all programs across units and areas.

It's essential that all who work in Forestry Assistance understand their role and the foundation, intent, funding structure, and needs of individual programs. Consistent and effective implementation of our programs requires collaborative development of annual priorities and workplans that are unique to the field and unit where they are implemented, and incorporate monitoring and reporting.

By **April 2022**, create an internal Forestry Assistance Leadership Council with representation from all levels of Forestry Assistance to lead and support on-the-ground implementation of the MFAP and the collaborative development of all programs.

By **April 2022**, begin collaborative development of an annual program of work that ensures annual priorities and operational plans are aligned with MFAP strategies.

By **Nov 2022**, develop a draft "Forestry Assistance Program Guide" connecting MFAP goals and strategies with all of our programs to ensure efficient implementation of the MFAP and continued delivery of our services. This will be a foundational product for Forestry Assistance that describes the purpose, roles and responsibilities, funding sources, and other important information for each program.

By **March 2023**, conduct an internal program review focused on workload, capacity, business practices, and workflows to identify inefficiencies and improvement opportunities.

Goal 2: Deliver effective and consistent leadership, communication, and service to landowners and the public that is both forward-looking and science-based.

It is paramount that our services are known, easily accessible, relevant to current issues, and grounded in science. It is important to equip landowners, resource managers, partners, and the public with the knowledge and tools to understand forest conditions, processes, and value.

By **June 2022** continue to increase the number of acres treated and landowners served in partnership with the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

By **October 2022**, replace the current Forestry Assistance website with an ARC Hub site that will more effectively communicate forestry assistance services to the public.

By **October 2022**, expand pool of qualified applicants for forest stewardship and fuels reduction grants, and work directly with these applicants to strengthen their proposals.

By **December 2022**, implement electronic and online application and payment options for the HRA program.

By **December 2022**, establish a working group to represent the Program for IT and GIS to develop and provide continuous support (including training) for new coordinated technology that enhances program delivery based on a robust technology needs assessment.

By **March 2024**, identify our public education needs and work with universities, tribes, conservation districts, and cooperative extension to develop them.



Goal 3: Recognize the contribution and role of a strong, adaptive, statewide forest products industry in creating resilient forests and building sustainable economies and vibrant communities.

The professionals of the forest products industry implement the on-the-ground management we need to create resilient forests, fire-adapted communities, and sustainable economies. Without a robust and diverse forest products industry the cost of restoration and management treatments would be cost prohibitive at a meaningful scale. The economic value realized from forest products is essential to help offset the high cost of managing and retaining our forest land base for multiple values. We recognize that an industry capable of processing all sizes of logs and all species of trees is a critical component of sustainable forest management. We support the expansion of existing markets and development of new forest product markets. We commit to consistent, constant, and effective messaging that highlights the critical role the forest products sector serves in achieving sustainable forest management.

From **April 2022** and forward, continue to work with our partners and landowners to increase the acres of actively managed forestland and support a sustainable, predictable, and stable supply of volume to our forest products industry.

By **January 2023**, strengthen our support and increase our activities and messaging highlighting the importance of the forest products industry.

By **June 2022**, collaboratively develop and support projects that utilize small diameter material, biomass, and development of new markets.

By **January 2023**, assist forest industry applications for federal grant programs that support production of innovative wood products and capital expenditures for upgrading mill infrastructure.



Goal 4: Recruit, develop, and retain a creative, diverse, dynamic, motivated, and professional workforce.

Our people are our number one asset, and they ensure the successful delivery of all our programs. Outstanding staff and funding will be vital to providing high quality forestry assistance and service to landowners and communities. We will recruit top talent from broad applicant pools. To ensure staff success and retention, we will offer and support training, professional development, and mentoring opportunities. We will pursue funding that includes capacity for new staff to continue delivering our programs efficiently and effectively.

By **February 2023**, prioritize federal grants that facilitate hiring staff with modified FTEs.

By **April 2023**, Forestry Assistance will use numerous outreach tools to recruit a broad pool of applicants with strong experience in the fundamentals of applied forest management and with education in science and silviculture. This will ensure new hires understand the benefits of effective forest management.

By **May 2023**, establish a routine space and process for incorporating innovative ideas and creative solutions in regular team meetings. These new approaches and solutions will be included in the workflow of specific projects and showcased in reporting.

By **May 2023**, diversify funding sources and increase grant funds awarded to the DNRC for personal services, on-the-ground project implementation, and program delivery.

By **March 2024**, create a workforce development plan specific to Forestry Assistance that aligns with all bureaus in the Division and Department efforts. This workforce development plan will include tactics and strategies for recruiting and retaining high-level professionals, as well as succession planning to maintain a continuity of service.



Goal 5: “Build, Foster, Create, Maintain” relationships and partnerships

We recognize that our professional partnerships and relationships increase our capacity and strengthen our work across boundaries. We are committed to improving our networking, strengthening existing partnerships and developing new relationships and partnerships that support efficient and effective outcomes on the ground.

From **April 2022** onward, continue active participation in collaborative and partnership groups actively working to implement the MFAP.

By **June 2023**, develop clear policies guiding role, use, selection, and operation of program steering committees, and external advisory councils to ensure they are configured to serve our dynamic environment.

From **June 2023** onward, recruit new partners using an intentional strategy, which evaluates partnership impacts and mutual benefits to ensure success.





APPENDIX

MONTANA FOREST ACTION PLAN

Implementing the Montana Forest Action Plan (MFAP) is a key deliverable for Forestry Assistance. Many of the strategies and goals within the forest action plan are reflected in our programs. The following appendix provides program-specific direct actions that Forestry Assistance will undertake to lead implementation of the MFAP.

Forestry Assistance Programs:

- Urban and Community Forestry
- Stewardship
- Forest Pest Management
- Forest Practices
- Forest Products
- Local Government Assistance
- Montana Conservation Seedling Nursery



THE URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY PROGRAM

Montana's Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) Program promotes best practice management resulting in attractive, healthy, sustainable, and safe community forests. The UCF Program provides technical and financial assistance, education, planning assistance and volunteer coordination to local governments, community leaders and volunteer groups. Urban and community forests are the key connection between people and trees. Successful management of urban forests includes an ecosystem-based approach to all trees in the community, regardless of ownership. Nearly 70% of Montana's population lives with-in cities and towns; more people benefit from urban forests than any other forest in Montana.

The program links multiple land and forest uses, involving recreation, parks, open-space lands, wood utilization and the wildland urban interface. The UCF Program plays an important role coordinating management activities across ownerships and building the capacity of local governments and partners to promote the health and wellbeing of forests and communities across the state. The UCF Program is positioned to support the implementation of the Montana Forest Action Plan through its efforts to reduce wildfire risk, improve forest health and promote human and community health, with a strong focus on climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Forest Health. Urban forests are a critical resource for communities, particularly when properly managed to realize their maximum ecological, economic, and health values. The benefits of urban forests for communities include conserving energy, improving air quality, moderating temperatures, and reducing storm water runoff. Urban forests play an important role mitigating some climate change effects by sequestering carbon, intercepting pollutants, stabilizing banks in the event of flooding, and providing shade. However, urban forests are also vulnerable to extreme weather events, drought, and temperature fluctuations that will become more frequent with climate change.

- The UCF program will maintain statewide community tree inventories, which are an important tool used to document the conditions, track and monitor changes in urban environments, impacts to forest health and composition, and identify maintenance needs of a community's forest and guide management decisions.
- The UCF program will analyze inventories for risk of insects and disease, climate driven impacts to overall forest health and composition, the diversity of tree species within a city, and other important management considerations.
- The UCF program will assist municipalities in adopting best management practices tailored to the needs of their forests and communities.
- The UCF program will continue to promote urban forest health to maximize ecosystem benefits, mitigate the impacts of climate change and increase forest resilience.

URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY PROGRAM Cont.

Wildfire Risk. Healthy urban tree populations can trap, settle, and hold dust and particulate pollutants from smoke and combat some emissions from wildland fires. The active management of urban trees and forests can play a key role in mitigating the adverse health impacts that exposure to wildfire smoke may cause for those in Montana's high population centers. In addition, adaptive landscapes such as climate-hardy deciduous trees are less prone to wildfire. Simply put, thriving deciduous trees do not burn as readily as most coniferous trees.

- The UCF program will collaborate with local governments and partners to identify and mitigate potential urban wildfire hazard zones and ensure that community forestry goals are aligned with WUI management objectives.
- The UCF program will develop landscape strategies to bridge community forestry practices with fire-adapted methods to benefit areas in the wildland urban interface.

Human and Community Health. Urban and community forests provide many human health benefits by creating recreational spaces, protecting municipal watersheds, and mitigating the impacts from extreme weather events. With predicted rises in temperature associated with climate change, urban tree populations can provide cooling effects that reduce heat related impacts on human health. Researchers continue to uncover new and imperative links between trees and people's mental health and wellbeing. The need for of urban forests was critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. Visitor rates to nearby parks and natural areas skyrocketed as people looked towards nature for physical and mental health. Most municipalities across the state lack urban forestry capacity and expertise to ensure that city planning efforts involve the retention and improvement of urban forests.

- The UCF program will coordinate with local governments to maintain community trees and implement development efforts that recognize the benefits of urban forests intentionally and deliberately.
- The UCF program will also promote equitable and culturally relevant education on, and resources about, the importance of urban forests to ensure the health and wellbeing of all Montanans.
- The UCF program will focus on communication and education, use best available science, and work towards a supportive policy framework to meet the growing demand for urban forest use.
- The UCF program will strengthen efforts to increase urban tree canopy cover, provide more shade to communities, and reduce the urban heat island effect. The program will focus efforts on tree equity to ensure all people benefit from community trees.



THE FOREST STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

This program provides technical, financial, and educational assistance in support of private and community forest owners to manage their forests actively and sustainably. In addition, the program pursues collaborative partnerships to increase services and resources to better serve, inform and educate Montana's forest owners. The Forest Stewardship Program is woven into many facets of the Forest Action Plan.

Forest Health: Forests are dynamic, and many threats to forest health can be mitigated through active-management interventions. The program supports educational and technical assistance to forest landowners so they can make informed decisions that sustain the diverse goals they have for their forests. Key program actions for this topic include:

- Assist private landowners in managing their forested lands to improve and restore healthy forests that are resilient to disturbance regimes and projected future climate change.
- Support and deliver outreach and educational opportunities to increase active stewardship of private and community forests.



Wildfire Risk: Montana's communities and the populations they support continue to develop into the wildland urban interface (WUI); the locations where human development and the natural environment meet. Active forest fuels management in the WUI is critical to the safety of individuals, their properties, the adjacent communities, and the firefighters who protect them. Program actions addressing Wildfire Risk include:

- Utilize the Montana Wildfire Risk Assessment to focus assistance that reduces the threat of wildfire to at-risk communities and surrounding landscapes.
- Offer services that are calibrated through local collaborative planning and Community Wildfire Protection Plans.
- Provide cost-share incentive grant programs to reduce wildfire risk, improve forest health, and enhance fire management response and safety.
- Collaborate with other Forestry Division programs to more effectively and efficiently offer technical and financial assistance to reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire behavior in the WUI.

FOREST STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM Cont.

Working Forests & Economies; Biodiversity & Habitat Conservation: The range of forest conditions, functions, and uses result in incredible biodiversity across Montana. A strong and diverse forest products industry is critical to restoring and sustaining these landscapes. Program actions addressing this topic include:



- Provide landowner services to minimize land fragmentation, services include: education, management plan development, and the promotion of active forest management.
- Identify opportunities to provide assistance and resources to support existing and innovative approaches to sustain working forest landscapes.
- Support integrated forest management and restoration projects that provide measurable benefits for critical wildlife habitat and important forest ecosystems.

Human & Community Health: Private and community forests contribute significantly to the aesthetic, recreation, and health benefits that forests provide to Montana's communities, residents, and visitors. Specific actions addressing this topic include:

- Prioritize management and restoration projects in Priority Areas for Focused Attention that support municipal watershed resiliency and other beneficial water uses.
- Support projects that maintain or improve intact and connected forested landscapes and watersheds.

Sustaining Cross-Boundary Work in Montana: It takes the breadth of private landowners and public land managers to accomplish resilient and healthy forests, develop wildfire adapted communities, and sustainably manage our forest resources for future generations. The program will provide landowners the tools they need to support cross-boundary forest management goals with these actions:

- Engage with local, cross-boundary coordination efforts to develop fire adapted communities and address forest health and resilience.
- Recruit forest landowners to participate in cross-boundary work.
- Promote the important role private lands play in community protection and maintaining healthy forest landscapes.

THE FOREST PEST MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

The Forest Pest Management Program (FPM) assists non-federal landowners and resource managers in preventing, identifying, and managing forest insects and diseases. Through DNRC's network of service foresters, FPM directly assists private landowners in managing their forested lands and provides cost-share programs and grants to improve forest health. This work is done to ensure forest structure, composition, and function are resilient to disturbance from forest pests and diseases of concern.

Forest Health: FPM's main purpose is to increase the resilience of forests to disturbance from insect, disease, and invasive species. FPM also works to mitigate climate change impacts to Montana forests and adapt Montana forests to a changing climate.

- FPM will administer funds through the Western Bark Beetle Initiative to support mechanical treatments that increase forest resilience to insects and diseases. Funding preference will be granted to projects in Forest Action Plan Priority Areas for Focused Attention.
- FPM will bolster agency capacity by contributing partner expertise and promoting interagency collaboration.
- FPM will work with partnering agencies to inventory and report forest conditions and pest occurrence on an annual basis, and will apply findings in appropriate forest management recommendations
 - FPM will continue to monitor, protect and promote at-risk tree species such as limber pine, whitebark pine, and green ash.
- FPM will support and engage in long-term monitoring and management of invasive species across ownerships and jurisdictions through applied science.
 - FPM will continue to participate in interagency trapping to detect non-native invasive pests.
 - FPM will continue its outreach efforts to discourage introduction of invasive pests.



Wildfire Risk: High mortality from insects and diseases can increase fuel loads and elevate wildfire risk. Many of the forest management recommendation made by FPM directly meet Wildfire Risk goals of the Forest Action Plan.

Working Forests and Economies: The program relies in part on a strong and diverse forest industry to provide the workforce, expertise, and equipment that is essential to meet forest health, management, and wildfire risk reduction goals. Many of the treatments supported by this program contribute to the sustainable supply of wood utilized by our state's forest industry.

THE FOREST PRACTICES PROGRAM

This program provides educational, technical, and operational assistance to support the forest products industry when conducting forest management operations. The program works as a partner with industry to provide training on Forestry Best Management Practices (BMP) and the Streamside Management Zone Law to protect water quality. The program also implements the Hazard Reduction (Slash) Law that works to limit the chance of wildfire starting from or being enhanced by slash that is generated as part of forest management operations. Providing educational opportunities on these practices and laws is a major component of the program.

Forest Health, Wildfire Risk, Biodiversity and Habitat Conservation:

Successful implementation of treatments to improve Forest Health, reduce Wildfire Risk, conserve Biodiversity and Habitat all requires highly skilled and well-trained forest workers capable of protecting water and other resources while maintaining an efficient operation. This program supports the industry's capacity to deliver on these areas of the MFAP.



Working Forests and Economies: Program provides forest workers and mills with the training and tools to conduct forest management following BMPs and laws to protect water resources while still maintaining an efficient operation. Key actions the program takes to support goals of the MFAP include:

- Train loggers and land managers cooperatively to meet the state requirements under various laws as well as follow the voluntary BMPs. Develop training in consultation with industry to keep the approach to protect other forest resources practical, efficient and to a high standard.
- Encourage new ideas and approaches to forest management and implement strategies to improve operations while minimizing impacts in the forest.
- Ensure that policies and practices are implemented consistently throughout the state.
- Incorporate the Forestry BMP Working Group (comprised of industry, non-industry, and agency members) recommendations and changes to the BMPs to assure full implementation of state-of-the-art forest practices.
- Work with industry to audit forest operations to strengthen training requirements and to provide options for reducing impacts and improving on-the-ground techniques.

THE FOREST PRODUCTS PROGRAM

This program provides technical assistance to support the forest products industry, forest biomass energy applications, market developments, and innovations. The program engages with the design-build sector to promote wood construction and Montana wood products and supports the state's industry retention efforts. The Wood Products Program directly supports the Working Forests and Economies goals of the MFAP.

Forest Health, Wildfire Risk, Biodiversity and Habitat Conservation:

The forest industry is essential to completing the on-the-ground work to mitigate wildfire risk and address numerous forest health issues. Many habitat management and restoration treatments require management of vegetation, including commercial harvesting. A strong and diverse forest industry provides the workforce, expertise, and equipment that is essential to meeting forest health, management, and wildfire risk reduction goals. This program supports these areas of the MFAP through efforts focused on the state's forest industry.

Working Forests and Economies: The work of the program reflects the importance of maintaining working forest landscapes for multiple benefits and supporting, maintaining, and diversifying the Forest Products industry and milling infrastructure. This is a key component to achieving forest health and wildfire risk reduction goals and to enhance local economies. Key program actions include:

- Deliver the monthly Forest Products Retention Roundtable to foster collaborative dialogue.
- Provide support to DNRC field offices for delivery of Forest Products Week.
- Support projects that can utilize small diameter material and advance the development of new markets.
- Assist forest industry in developing applications for federal grant programs that support production of innovative wood products and upgrading mill infrastructure.
- Monitor local renewable energy policy and initiatives and provide information and expertise to appropriately represent forest biomass and support implementation of the Forest Action Plan.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Local Government Forest Advisor (advisor) works with counties, cities, agencies, and partners to improve forest health and reduce wildfire risk across ownerships throughout Montana. The advisor position was established by the Montana legislature to support local government engagement with federal land management. The program provides funding, information, and other resources to county commissioners and city officials for their efforts to align federal forest plans and activities with local interests. The program connects with many goals in the MFAP.

Wildfire Risk/Forest Health: Support local government engagement in federal land management plans and projects to reduce wildfire risk and improve forest health. Provide technical expertise, tools, funding, and training to:

- Help align federal agency efforts with local government plans and goals for community wildfire protection and increasing forest resilience, including adaptation to changes of Montana's climate.
- Help coordinate federal activities with work on state and private lands.
- Support county and community actions to implement the national Cohesive Strategy (community protection, landscape resiliency, fire response) with Fire Protection staff and field managers.

Working Forests and Economies: Federal timber sales provide important revenue for counties, and forest industry provides good paying jobs in rural communities.

- Assist local government with review and comment supporting federal plans and projects that foster prosperous communities, and retention of a forest products industry.
- Work with the forest products industry and local leadership to develop comprehensive long-term plans that establish a consistent supply of materials for existing industry and encourage new investment in wood utilization infrastructure.

Sustaining Cross Boundary Work: Wildfire risk and forest health are landscape issues that cross ownership boundaries. Local government engagement is important for successfully implementing cross boundary work. Program actions supporting cross boundary work include:

- Assist local collaboration through funding, peer learning, and engagement with local governments and other stakeholders.
- Assist local collaborative groups, inclusive of local government, to develop governance structures and increased capacity to ensure cross-boundary coordination continues.
- Promote and support the use of authorities and programs developed to increase the pace and scale of forest management and restoration.

THE CONSERVATION SEEDLING NURSERY PROGRAM

The Nursery Program is critical conservation infrastructure providing top quality plants and seedlings for conservation projects across the state. Establishment of the Nursery was authorized in 1924 by the Clarke-McNary Act which recognized the importance of regenerating forests for conservation goals, including a continuous supply of timber. Today the Nursery is focused on conservation and the need for seedlings for conservation and reforestation after harvesting and wildfire is increasingly important. The Nursery's work is directly aligned with our efforts targeting Forest Health, Biodiversity and Habitat Conservation, Wildfire Risk, and Working Forests and Economies. Re-establishing forests after severe wildfire; and, increasing resilience through species and age class diversification require a consistent supply of site-appropriate high-quality seedlings.

Forest Health: Planting is an important tool to increase forest resilience to wildfire, windthrow, insects and diseases, and climate change. Planting is an important tool for climate change adaptation and mitigation. Silviculture that incorporates artificial regeneration provides many opportunities for optimizing carbon sequestration, climate adaptation and future resilience.

- The Nursery will provide site appropriate species and varieties of seedlings for conservation projects in the state; and will work with project partners to identify cross-boundary projects that will be improved with plantings.
- The Nursery will monitor local and regional climate trends, disturbance patterns, and regeneration survival patterns to inform species and variety production and assist project planners.

Biodiversity and Habitat Conservation: Healthy, viable populations of native species require specific habitats. Maintaining and restoring these habitats often requires establishing new vegetation.

- The Nursery will engage with collaborative groups, conservation-oriented non-profits and the Montana Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks to ensure demand for desired trees and shrub species is anticipated and met.

Wildfire Risk: Severe wildfire exacerbated by a changing climate poses significant risks to our communities and to the perpetuation of some forest types.

- The Nursery will pursue resources and opportunities for expanding capacity to increase seedlings available for post-fire reforestation and recovery efforts, following severe wildfire events and when natural reforestation is unlikely.

Working Forests and Economies: The focus of our most urgent work in the forest now is fuels reduction and reducing density to address critical forest health issues. However, regeneration remains an important consideration as we look towards the future. Reforestation is an important component of comprehensive long-term plans that establish a consistent supply of materials.